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Two members of Congress say the United States needs to take stronger steps, along with European allies, to pressure Iran to stop its suspected nuclear weapons program. Their proposals, including a potential ban on gasoline shipments to Iran, are contained in a resolution they are introducing in the House of Representatives.

Republican Congressman Mark Kirk, and Democrat Rob Andrews say the United States needs to take more aggressive steps to support efforts by the European Union to persuade Iran to end its nuclear ambitions.

Saying Iran's quest for nuclear weapons threatens to place the Middle East on a nuclear hair trigger, they say the incentives put forward so far by the EU have not worked.

As Congressman Kirk explains, the proposal is to take advantage of a key Iranian vulnerability, its over-reliance on gasoline imports.

"We have this lever, a potential gasoline quarantine on Iran," he explained. "A quarantine which would not affect international oil markets, but would heavily affect just Iran alone. And if this policy was discussed it could give a huge impetus to the European Union effort, which my colleague [Congressman] Andrews and I both think offers the best chance for working our way out of this threat without anyone being hurt."

The lawmakers say this is something that should be discussed now in advance of any Iranian decision to choose what Congressman Kirk describes as a path of confrontation on the nuclear issue.

Congressman Andrews says such a step could embolden progressive and pro-Democracy forces inside Iran pressing for reforms, but asserts what is at stake is a much bigger and ultimately dangerous scenario.

"What is not in controversy is that the Iranians have actively pursued a nuclear weapons program, and that they actively deceive the rest of the world about that pursuit for a quarter of a century," said Mr. Andrews. "The risk we are discussing tonight is not only the risk that one of the missiles [Congressman] Kirk just described would rain down on U.S. troops in the Middle East or on our friends in Israel, or in a friendly Arab state. The risk is that this risk could manifest itself in Times Square, or in the nation's capital, through the use of a nuclear weapon in an unconventional way."

In putting forward their ideas, the congressmen stress their proposals are based on the premise that it would be unacceptable for Iran to possess a nuclear weapon.

They add that what they call many diplomatic means must be exhausted before any consideration is given to a military solution to the Iranian nuclear issue.

But they say it is necessary to begin a process of looking at meaningful and effective sanctions if the Iran nuclear issue must eventually be submitted to the U.N. Security Council.

The lawmakers say it remains to be seen if the Friday presidential election in Iran brings about a change in the posture of the Tehran government on the nuclear issue.